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INFO RUEHSW/AMEMBASSY BERN PRIORITY 1217
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 7406
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 8683
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ FEB 8520
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 4749
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 9579
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0365
RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 5405
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0136
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
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S E C R E T BOGOTA 001109

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/13/2017

TAGS: PTER SNAR KCRM PHUM PGOV CO

SUBJECT: ELN NARCO ACTIVITIES INCREASINGLY APPARENT

REF: BOGOTA 509 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer

Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

¶1. (S) There is growing evidence of ELN fronts' narcotics trafficking activities, and credible indications the ELN's Central Command (COCE) permits and benefits financially from the drug trade. Testimony from demobilized ELN fighters says some ELN fronts are deeply involved in narco activities. The ELN processes less cocaine base than the FARC, but is heavily involved in taxing stages of production, and sells directly to traffickers. A senior ELN terrorist told the COCE in a private December letter the organization had to choose between peace or narcotrafficking. End summary.

Reports of ELN Narco Activities Increasing, Credible

¶2. (C) Debriefings of demobilized ELN fighters show increasing involvement by ELN fronts in a wide range of narcotics trafficking activities. In Embassy debriefings, 12 former ELN guerrillas said the ELN's Central Command (COCE) had permitted fronts to engage in narcotrafficking since 1998, when income from kidnappings and extortion started to decline. The ELN is organized into 5 "War Fronts" (North, Northeast, Central, Southeast, and Northwest), which have authority over about 39 rural fronts, 9 urban fronts, and 7 companies. Fronts appear to have nominal strength of about 70, in many cases substantially fewer. Total ELN strength is estimated at some 2,500.

¶3. (C) The demobilized fighters said ELN fronts in Arauca, North Santander, Antioquia, south Bolivar, Valle del Cauca, and Narino departments received 90 percent of their income from narco activities. They cited as a recent example of the ELN leadership's knowledge of drug involvement a case in which the ELN's National Directorate (which reports to the COCE) assigned terrorist "Paula" to better organize the narco finances of the "Dario de Jesus Ramirez Castro" front, operating in Bolivar, Antioquia, and Choco. The demobilized told us about 80 percent of narco proceeds go to the

"cuadrilla," or front sub-unit, responsible for collecting them, and are used for general expenses. Another 10 percent goes to the front's leadership directorate, with the balance sent to the COCE.

¶4. (S) The demobilized told us ELN narco activities range from cultivation to processing. They also tax campesinos and make direct sales to traffickers, mostly in Medellin.

Sensitive reporting said the ELN's production of cocaine base is less than that of the FARC, with heavy taxing of laboratories and growers being more common. One sensitive report said the "Dario de Jesus Ramirez Castro" front earned over \$270,000 in two months in sales of cocaine base to Medellin traffickers.

Senior ELN Terrorist Letter Confirms Narco Trend

¶5. (C) Francisco Galan, who is a member of the ELN's team negotiating with the GOC, said in a private December 19 letter to the COCE that the ELN was "at a crossroads: peace or narcotrafficking." In the letter, Galan said the post-9/11 "war on terrorism" had harmed the ELN politically. He told the COCE kidnappings are now politically unsustainable. Galan insisted that maintaining the ELN's military campaign would mean stepping up kidnappings and getting involved in narcotrafficking "in an accelerated and uncontrolled manner," leading to alliances with paramilitaries or to being absorbed by the FARC.

¶6. (C) GOC-ELN civil society guarantor Alvaro Jimenez told us Galan knows the extent of ELN's narco business and fears the ELN's "political project," such as it is, is fighting a losing battle against the huge profits available to fronts from drugs. In the December 19 letter, Galan tells the COCE of the strong perception in Colombia that the ELN obtains over 50 percent of its income from drug proceeds.

FARC Attacks Increase Pressure on ELN

¶7. (C) A series of FARC attacks on the ELN and its alleged sympathizers in recent months have caused deaths numbering about 300, especially in Arauca, Cauca, and Nariño. The ELN sought Catholic Church mediation with the FARC in Arauca, with little success. By all accounts, the struggle is primarily over territory and drug routes. FARC statements have accused the ELN of treachery and of working with the paramilitaries and the armed forces. ELN statements have urged talks with the FARC to resolve differences.

DRUCKER